In her 1924 essay “Mr. Bennet and Mrs. Brown” Virginia Woolf wrote:

On or about December 1910, human character changed. I am not saying that one went out, as one might into a garden, and there saw that a rose had flowered, or that a hen had laid an egg. The change was not sudden and definite like that. But a change there was, nevertheless; and, since one must be arbitrary, let us date it about the year 1910.

Woolf meant by this a change in the \textit{zeitgeist} that seems to have transformed the visual arts (with the development of Cubism), architecture (with the development of Bauhaus), poetry (with Imagism and assorted poetic movements—with associated manifestoes and aligned literary magazines—culminating in the transformation of the possibilities of poetry by Pound, Eliot, and Stevens), and fiction (with the development of modernist experiments in point of view and narrative form by Joyce and Woolf herself). These transformations may or may not be linked (scholars argue about this) with the political transformations that both caused and resulted from the First World War, and with the economic transformations attendant upon the modernization of the world economy. One might link the artistic changes Woolf describes to the scientific and political changes Max Weber described (and registered) in his famous essay “Science as a Vocation,” written in 1918 while civil war in Germany was raging just outside of his classroom.

Woolf’s choice of date is meant to be wry, but she has pointedly not chosen August 1914 (a date often enshrined in syllabi about modernism). Whatever it was that happened, the change in the world of all of the arts in the west that happened in that era was as profound as the change that separated the arts of the age of Mozart from the arts of the age of Beethoven.

This course will confine itself to texts by United States authors (yes, we get to claim T. S. Eliot too!), but it will pay equal attention to texts in prose and in verse, and will look at texts from many regions of U.S. culture, including some authors who were opposed to the modernist experiment and sought alternative forms.
Texts

- Fitzgerald, F. Scott Tender is the Night Scribner ISBN: 978-0684801544

Sessions

**Week 1** (January 14, 19) Ernest Hemingway: *In Our Time*
You may be familiar with *A Farewell to Arms*, Hemingway’s novel of the First World War, or *The Sun Also Rises*, his novel of the disordered lives of the “lost generation” of the 1920s. His first book, the story collection *In Our Time*, makes bolder stylistic experiments than any of his famous novels. It’s my belief that the short story was a more congenial form for Hemingway anyway.

(January 26) *The Waste Land*
Eliot’s poetry changed how poetry was written forever, and for the next few decades to be a poet in English was to take a stance about Eliot’s style, his thematic concerns, even his politics and gender ideology.

**Week 3** (January 28, February 2) *The Waste Land* (continued)

**Week 4** (February 4, 9) William Faulkner: *The Sound and The Fury*
This early *tour de force* of multiple point of view narration is Faulkner’s most ambitious engagement with the modernist style as practiced by Joyce and Woolf. It also represents an almost systematic opposition to the style championed by Hemingway. (Yet, curiously, both authors went to school to the same mentor, Sherwood Anderson, whose *Winesburg, Ohio* taught them how to write short
stories, and whose patronage helped them in their early careers, but whom both authors later broke with and ridiculed.)

**Week 5** (February 11, 23) *The Sound and the Fury* (continued)

**Winter Recess: February 13–21**

**Week 6** (February 25, March 1) Willa Cather: *A Lost Lady*
Cather was a principled anti-modernist in fiction. This enigmatic, lyrical novel, with its very morally ambiguous central figure, certainly looks back to her own earlier *My Ántonia*. But how Marian Forrester is portrayed provides an interesting counterpoint to Faulkner’s Candace Compson and Hurston’s Janey.


**Week 8** (March 10, March 15) Hart Crane: *The Bridge*
Crane saw himself as at once an enthusiastic embracer of the modernist style in poetry projected by Eliot, and as a proponent of poetry of Whitman’s scope and subjects. Learning from Eliot’s style, but rejecting both his politics and his subjects, and for that matter rejecting his skeptical treatment of modern culture, Crane sought to turn poetry in a different direction. Few thought of *The Bridge* as a great success when it was published, but even those most critical of his work, from his frenemy Allen Tate to the poet-critic Yvor Winters (who called him “a saint of the wrong religion”), could not resist the charisma of his poetry.

**March 10** Medium paper due to Writing Group
**March 17** Medium paper due to instructor

Stevens’ greatest fame as a poet came in the 1940s and 1950s, when he wrote poetry that asks deep questions about the relationship between reality and imagination, and about the place of imagination in a world which stigmatizes imagination as empty. But he started his poetic career as a Greenwich-Village avant-gardist in the ‘teens. The reader should no more reduce him to the insurance
company Vice-President he became than Eliot should be reduced to the Tory banker he pretended to be.

**Week 10** (March 24, 29) Stevens: *Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction*, “The Auroras of Autumn,” “The Course of a Particular,” “Of Mere Being”

**March Break: March 25-28**

**Week 11** (March 31, April 5) F. Scott Fitzgerald *Tender is the Night*
Since most of you will have read *The Great Gatsby* I have chosen to assign Fitzgerald’s other, rather flawed, masterpiece instead. *Tender is the Night* is a novel of the 1930s, and one way to make sense of it is to see it as an attempt of a 1920s sensibility to make sense of the very different literary world of the Depression.

**Week 12** (April 7, 12) Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes were Watching God*
This rich, folkloric novel is the best-known text of the Harlem Renaissance.

**April 14** Medium paper due to Writing Group

**April 19** Medium paper due to instructor

**Week 13** (April 14, 19) Ellison: *Invisible Man*
A masterwork. And the hinge between the modernist and postmodernist periods.

### Requirements

1. **Short papers** There will be short (two pages or so) writing assignments due every Tuesday for six weeks, beginning September 1, and ending October 15. You will pick a passage of about 250 words from the reading for that day or the next and type it out. Be sure to pick a passage which strikes you as rich and interesting and full of a significance that might not be already obvious to every reader of that text. In other words, I don’t want you to pick a passage that will enable you to repeat some point I have already made in the lecture, but rather some passage which will enable you to bring a new reflection into our conversation, some passage that casts some new light upon the conversation we have already been having, some light that we might not have seen were it not for you. You will write a two page (or so) commentary on that passage, giving what you take its point to be, noting its context, and developing in cogent detail the claim it leads you to make about the text. Imagine that you are writing for someone who has some knowledge of the text but who does not know what precisely is your point of view about it—someone rather like the other members of this class, for instance. I will not give particular papers letter grades, but I will comment upon them and give them either a check, a check plus, or a check minus. You are to turn the whole lot of them in again at the end of the term, and they will be the basis for your final grade. Attendance at the lectures and
discussion sections is mandatory. If you miss one of either, I will expect you to explain to me why in writing at the next class.

2. **Other papers** Two relatively short papers dealing closely with a brief text or with an aspect of a longer one. The first, of 5-6 pp., will be due on **November 3** to your writing group, and on **November 10** to me. This paper should be an extended exercise in close reading. The second, of 7-9 pp., may engage the literary-critical tradition of commentary on the poem you discuss. This will be due on **December 1** to your writing group, and on the last day of class (**December 8**) to me.

### Policies

1. **Disability** If you are a student with a documented disability at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please see the course instructor immediately.

2. **Attendance and Participation** Attendance in this course is required. A student with more than two unexcused absences should expect to fail the course. Participation in the class discussion is required, so come to class prepared to speak. There may well be classes at Brandeis in which you can coast for much of the term and recover yourself by heroic efforts at the end, but this isn't one of them. It's best to plan to work steadily.

3. **Extensions** You must contact me no later than the class before a paper is due to receive an extension. I will not grant extensions on the due date of the paper. Late papers will be docked in proportion to their lateness.

4. **Academic Honesty** You are expected to be honest in all of your academic work. The University policy on academic honesty is distributed annually as section 5 of the *Rights and Responsibilities* handbook. Instances of alleged dishonesty will be forwarded to the Office of Campus Life for possible referral to the Student Judicial System. Potential sanctions include failure in the course and suspension from the University. If you have any questions about my expectations, please ask.

5. **Electronics** You are not allowed to have an open laptop in this class. Please turn off your cell phones for the duration of the class.

6. **Four-Credit Course (with three hours of class-time per week)** Success in this 4 credit hour course is based on the expectation that students will spend a minimum of 9 hours of study time per week in preparation for class (readings, papers, discussion sections, preparation for exams, etc.).

### Assignment Weights

I view calculations using these values with suspicion, and I will not accept arguments about your final grade based on calculations from this table, but I include this table to give you a rough idea of how much each assignment is worth.

- Short Papers 20 %
• First Paper 20 %
• Second Paper 35 %
• Participation 25 %